**ORBITALS**

This is an ideal way to address both commonalities and differences among middle-level learners. Indeed, the strategy appears easily adapted to learners of all levels.

* Orbitals are independent investigations, generally of three to six weeks. The ‘orbit” or revolve around some facet of the curriculum.
* Students select their own topics.
* They work with coaching and guidance from the teacher to develop more expertise both on the topic and on the process of becoming an independent investigator.
* The teacher helps students to develop the BIG, clear question for study, a plan for research, a method of presentation and criteria for quality.
* Successfully completing an orbital includes keeping a log of time spent on the study, resources used, and ideas and skills gained.
* It also requires that students provide a written overview of what was learned for the teacher to review.
* The student makes a 10-20 min.(varies of course) presentation to at least 5 peers, providing a one-page handout for the audience and using a display of demonstration The student must also develop a way in which to get peer feedback on the content and presentation.

Orbital allow for differentiation of content because students select their own topics and research materials, process because students develop their own study plans, and products because students can select from a wide range of options about how to express their learning.

In orbital studies, content, process and product are differentiated by student choice rather than by teacher choice. Teachers, however play an active role in coaching students.

Differentiate HOW: Orbitals focus on differentiation by student interest and learning profile.

Differentiate WHY: Students are energized by school and the learning process when it belongs to them and when they can shine in what they love to do.